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ABSTRACT

This report is based upon the views and opinions of 2,670 students and 137 teachers in high schools and middle schools in four school districts in California. Quotes from students and teachers are used as illustrations, and as reminders of the human dimension to the schools' problems and successes. The report is divided into sections representing issues which students and teachers identify in assessing the quality of teaching, and the policies and structures which may make effective teaching problematic. Each section discusses an issue and makes recommendations for enhancing and better supporting teachers in their efforts to provide effective learning experiences. Some subjects discussed are: (1) students' perceptions of teachers and the teaching profession; (2) students' assessment of the impact of teachers on their lives; (3) students' opinions on teachers' knowledge of subject matter; (4) students' judgments on what makes a good or a poor teacher; (5) teachers' perceptions of student behavior, working conditions, and relationships with administrators; (6) problems faced by beginning teachers; and (7) teachers' and students' opinions on choosing teaching as a career. (JD)

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VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

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STUDENTS AND TEACHERS SPEAK OUT ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING IN OUR SCHOOLS

SP 025 522

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

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A Report of the Students for Quality Teaching Project/ Citizens Policy Center

Laurie Olsen
and
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Laurie Olsen
Executive Director

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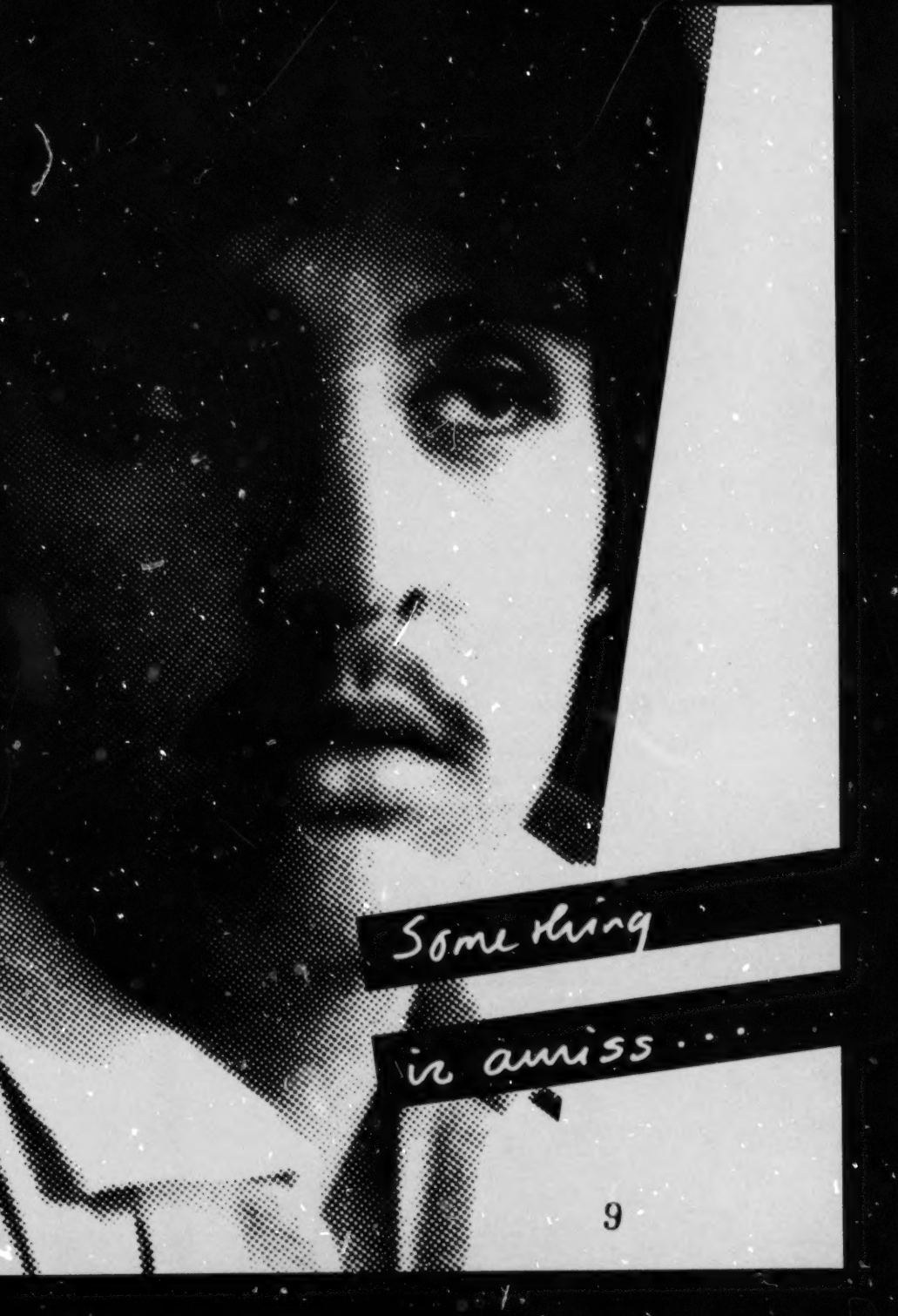
Something
is amiss...

The President's Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties describes the problem thus "... continued failure by the schools to perform their traditional role adequately, together with a failure to respond to the emerging needs of the 1980's, may have disastrous consequences for this nation."

The opinion that U.S. public schools are in trouble is widespread. During the past few years numerous prestigious reports by educational experts have urged major reforms in the schools. By many indicators—teacher competency, student test scores, truancy and drop-out rates—the schools' performance falls short of public expectations and desires. Some schools clearly do an exemplary job of educating the young, yet far too many students leave the schools without having essential skills.

The concern comes from diverse quarters. Some people believe the "softening" of curricula to include family living issues, health, peer group adjustment and other social skills erodes the schools' basic function, which is to teach students to read and write. Others perceive the problem as fiscal, arguing that schools are being asked to do more and more on funding that is insufficient to meet yesterday's expectations, much less provide the comprehensive education promised to all students. Some view the very structure of the schools as ill-suited to the needs of learning students and teaching adults.

A popular perception is that the problem stems from excessive expectations. Schools, in this view, have become the nation's social problem solver, charged with alleviating racial and ethnic prejudice, assimilating thousands of non-English speaking immigrants and refugees and assuring educational opportunities for a variety of special needs students. Some believe the crisis is rooted in technological changes that demand new skills and knowledge that the schools are ill-prepared to provide.

Regardless of who or what is to blame, clearly "something" is amiss.

- International comparisons of student achievement reveal that in many subjects Americans lag behind students of other industrialized nations.
- 13% of all American 17-year-olds are functionally illiterate, and some experts estimate that up to 40% of minority youth may be illiterate.
- The average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests now is lower than it was 26 years ago when the Soviet Union's Sputnik spurred a national swing toward academic excellence.
- More than half of the gifted students' academic achievement does not match their tested ability or potential.
- Science achievement scores of American 17-year-olds have steadily declined. Verbal scores on Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) have fallen an average of 50 points and math scores more than 40 points since 1963.

- *Many teachers complain of low morale, burnout and lax professional standards.*
- *Schools face severe teacher shortages in some subject areas because they can't compete with industry for college graduates in high demand fields such as math, science and computer technology.*
- *In California, the estimated student drop-out rate is close to 30%.*

> *Christy, a high school junior who participated in our research, is aware of the problems but has no solutions.*
> ***"I don't get it," she says, "I go to school, and work hard. . . do all my homework and really try. I want a good future for myself. Then we read in the paper that student test scores are lower than they used to be, that the schools are doing a lousy job and that we just aren't cutting it the way people used to. Are we just dumber than kids used to be? Are the teachers worse now? Are we not getting something that people used to get in their classes? What am I missing out on? I can't do anything about the fact that I was born in 1969!"***

Public schools have faced crises before. Throughout the last century, the practice of schooling has been expected to respond to society's rapidly changing concerns. Though philosophically America has long been commited to the concept that democracy and education are essential to one another, the school system has had great difficulty responding to new interpretations of that mandate, especially because so many people seem ambivalent about providing adequate resources and direction to the schools.

During the depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, support for public education was slashed by local governments as tax revenues dried up. In the 1920s the schools were considered too inefficient to educate large numbers of children in the basic skills required for an increasingly industrialized nation. Major reforms were recommended and educators designed junior high schools and platooning, an efficient use of school facilities in which children are moved from class to class and onto the playground while others use the classrooms.

In the 1950s, Russia's Sputnik satellite generated widespread concern about the lack of scientific training offered in U.S. schools. Large comprehensive high schools became a model for offering broad curricula. During the 1960s, as the na-

tion grappled with racial segregation and other civil rights battles, community and parent involvement in school policies and school integration were a major focus of reforms, as was emphasis on multicultural curricula.

The crisis today is many faceted: the quality of education and the need to link educational programs with the technological revolution, deep financial troubles, declining public confidence in public education and a coming shortage of teachers. While crises are not new for the schools, students are paying higher and higher prices for the schools' failures. Today, as never before, young people need to learn increasing levels of literacy skills and sophistication in order to compete in the labor market and adapt to the many technological changes anticipated in the decades ahead.

The decline in public confidence—apparent in the public's willingness to support the schools with sufficient tax revenues and by the flight of students from the public school system—has been documented in numerous opinion polls and reports. A national Gallup Poll asked it's sample to grade the schools. In 1974, 18% of the respondents awarded the schools an "A," but only 8% did in 1982. Field Poll results show that California residents have even less confidence in their public schools than people in other states have in their schools.

Not surprisingly, this lack of confidence during a nationwide economic recession has meant least financial support for public schools, with a lack of confidence in administrators and teachers blamed for much of the public's negative view. Gallup Poll respondants who favored tax increases for the schools often argued that more money was needed to hire better teachers. Those who opposed tax increases for the schools argued that teachers were not doing their jobs and the schools were wasting money; if students are not learning adequately, they reasoned, teachers must not be teaching well enough.

The educational community has been abuzz for the last five years as experts try to figure out what can be done to upgrade the schools—and upgrade the profession of teaching. They've come up with the following reform areas: recruiting and training more able teachers, raising academic standards for student performance, increasing school time, recruiting and rewarding highly qualified school administrators, raising college and university requirements, improving teacher training and upgrading their professional image, and creating career ladders and incentive structures to motivate excellence among teachers.

Meanwhile, however, students have not been heard from. The main consumers of education have not been asked for their perspective on the quality of the education they receive or of the teachers from whom they learn. Legislators and academicians design and debate reforms aimed at pulling out of the crisis, and many of these changes have profound implications for students. Yet, students have been absent from the debate.

Students for Quality Teaching Project was designed to create a forum and other ways to involve students in discussion about educational reforms. Reflecting Citizens Policy Center's goal to involve young people substantively in policy areas that affect their lives, we designed this project to learn how students perceive the crisis in education, how they view the quality of teaching within their schools, the methods and approaches they feel best exemplify good teaching, and their opinions on proposed reforms.

While students and teachers agree on many issues in their evaluations of the quality of education, their differences are significant. Our research sought to learn how students and teachers view currently proposed education reforms, and to find out how important they feel it is to improve teaching quality. The following shows student and teacher reactions to reforms that experts propose:

A REPORT CARD OF SUGGESTED EDUCATION REFORMS

Grade* given by students	SUGGESTED REFORM	Grade given by teachers
A+	Improve the overall quality of teaching	A–
A	Offer a wider variety of courses	C
A–	Higher pay for all teachers	B+
B+	More one-to-one instruction and help available	C+
B	More student participation and involvement in making decisions	F
B–	Fair and consistently applied rules	C
C+	Smaller class size	A+
C	Do something to get rid of or improve bad teachers	F
C–	More focus on basic skills	B
D+	Improve the facilities**	D
D	Higher standards for promotion and graduation	B–
F	Stricter Discipline	A
F	New books and better materials	C–
F	Lengthen the school day	D–

* Grading system is based on the rank order received in surveys. A = 1–3, B = 4–6, C = 7–9, D = 10–12, F lower ranks.

** This overall ranking is somewhat misleading as a total figure. Two schools ranked it very high (#2 among students, #3 among teachers), and other school sites rated it lower than other reforms.

This report is based upon the views and opinions of 2,670 students and 137 teachers in high schools and middle schools in four school districts in California: Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and John Swett Unified. The data varied considerably from school site to school site—reflecting differences in administration, school population and size, and histories. While school size is clearly a major factor contributing to problems with providing quality teaching, so too is the style and approach of the site administrator. Data is here reported in aggregate form only, at times masking the significant school by school differences. The text points out where these differences are most marked.

Quotes from students and teachers are sprinkled liberally throughout the report, as illustrations and as reminders of the human dimension to the problems and successes of the schools.

This report is divided into sections representing issues which students and teachers identify in assessing the quality of teaching and the policies and structures which may make quality teaching problematic. Each section discusses an issue and provides recommendations for enhancing and better supporting teachers in their efforts to provide quality learning experiences for students.

Assessing and improving the quality of teaching were the major foci of this research. But teaching quality is related to school reforms which, according to teachers and students, are needed to provide the best educational environment. Teaching occurs within the context of an entire school system, so reforms aimed at improving teaching quality are recommended as part of overall education reform. Thus, while this report makes recommendations to improve the quality of

teaching, some issues touched upon go beyond the profession of teaching.

Some of the recommendations can be implemented by an individual teacher within his or her classroom. Others require decisions and action by state and local policymakers. All of the recommendations stem directly from the perspectives and concerns of the students and teachers who participated in this research. Implementing the recommended reforms would provide teachers with the conditions they need to teach well and provide students the learning atmospheres and resources they deserve.

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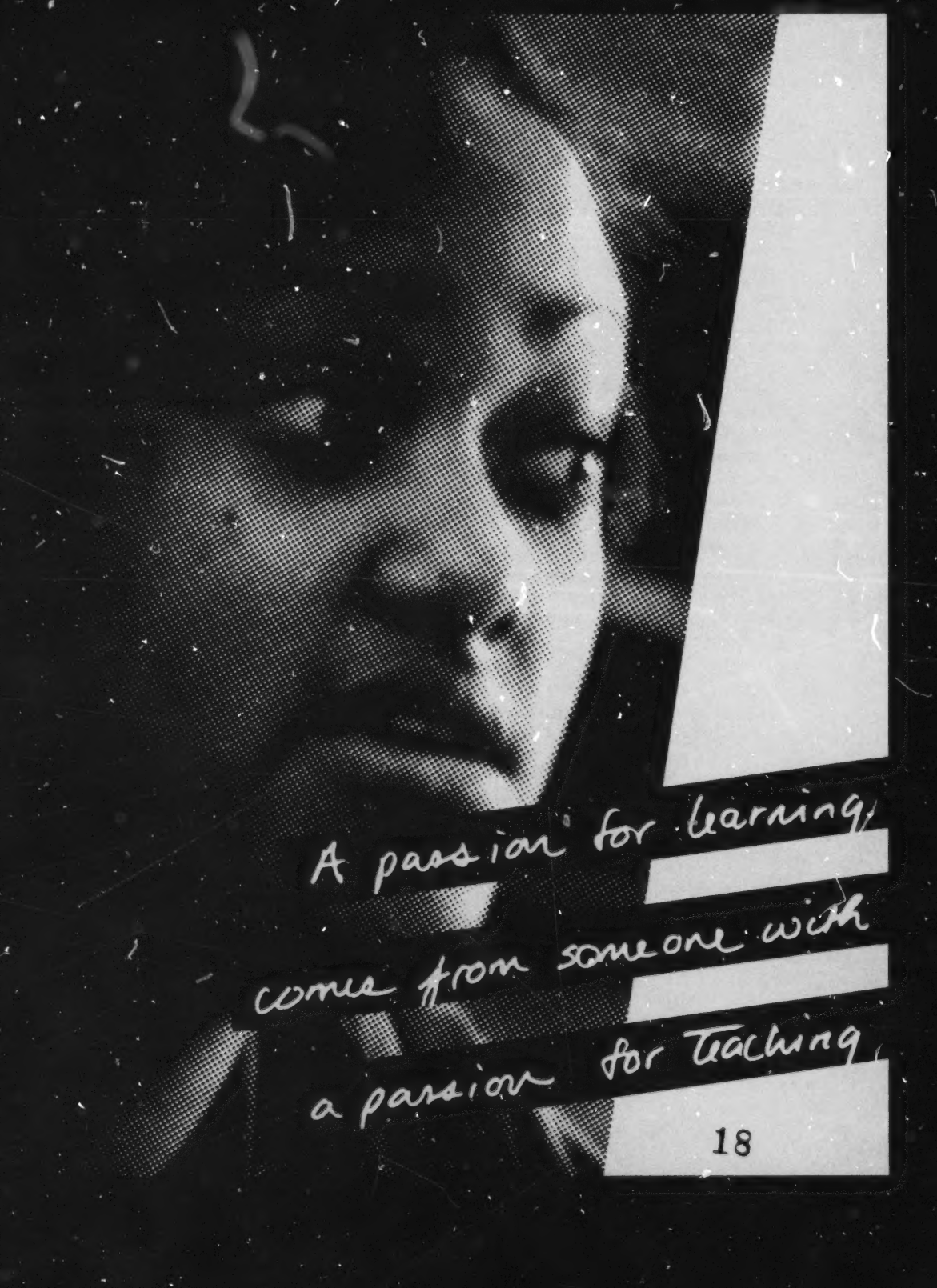

A passion for learning
comes from someone with
a passion for teaching.

Concern about the teaching profession stems from concern about student learning. If students were learning what they need to know, developing the skills to become intellectually active and to survive in the labor market, it might not have become a major policy concern that teachers suffer from low status, have salaries below private industry, or work in difficult working conditions. But students are not learning what society feels they need to learn. As the nation faces a severe shortage of teachers, particularly in the sciences and math, we must begin to address ourselves to what can be done to attract new people to the field, to upgrade the quality of interaction in the classroom, and to decide as a nation that public education is worth supporting.

At school, students ought to learn to use their minds, to approach problems and events with skills and knowledge that help them make sense out of their world. The teacher is the key to learning process because education takes place in the classroom—in the interactions between students and teacher, in the environment created by the teacher, in the use of materials presented by the teacher. The teacher is far more than a conveyor of information.

Most of the students we interviewed view their teachers as unhappy with their jobs, underpaid and disgruntled, and wholly unsupported in their efforts to educate. The majority "have given up," "teach the same stuff now they did twenty years ago," and too many are "boring and bored," students say. Nine in ten of the students in the project sample said they would not consider going into public school teaching. Their reasons are revealing: teaching seems to them like a boring and thankless job.

Fortunately, many students we surveyed (55%) have experienced teaching they consider "great"—teaching they report has had a major impact on their lives. They speak with great excitement and love about those teachers who have truly aroused their curiosity and interest in a subject and who "really cared about me." The teaching situation varies and the particulars of the student-teacher relationship differ markedly, yet certain common themes pervade student and teacher descriptions of the power and passion of the interaction "when it really works."

"It's hard to find words to tell you how I feel about Mr. Jameson," says Mario, a junior, "He has just hung in there with me through some bad times. He always believed I could do it, pushed me when I needed it, and just always really cared about how I was doing. If I make it through school, it'll be because of him."

Many students tell stories of some teacher who made a significant difference in their lives: turned them on to a new subject, who demanded a lot of them and got them to really apply themselves, who noticed when they fell behind and tried to help. Through such accounts and responses to questions about teachers they view as effective and ineffective, patterns emerged that indicate what students consider important in teaching and how they define good quality teaching.

"Great" teachers model the pursuit of knowledge. They show excitement and curiosity about knowledge, feel personal payoff in problem solving, demonstrate that answers are not fixed and new skills and insights are necessary and useful, encourage observation and analysis and are committed to the success and involvement of their students. In all cases, the twin passions are there—passion for subject matter and the passionate commitment to the students' involvement in education.

Marie, a high school junior, gives an example:

> ***"I don't know what it is about Mr. Rossi. But you walk into his class at the beginning of the year having no idea really why you're taking this class about Shakespeare, and before you know it you're really excited and into it and are kind of swept away. He is just excited, and he really believes that you can do it, too and that you will love it too. Everyone loves his class."***

Teachers can greatly influence their students. The heart of education is at the point of contact between student and teacher. All education structures, policies and resources are significant only to the degree they nurture and make possible a quality learning experience in the classroom. Therefore, before dissecting the characteristics of good teaching or exploring the policies and structures that support effective teaching, we'll look at the power of the interactions between a student and a teacher.

Louis, a senior, tells how it was for him:

> ***"My sophomore year was the lowest point possible for me. It was really bad. I'd run away and was living with a family that wasn't working out. I was drinking too much and really felt out of it. I barely went to classes, and when I went I couldn't focus on what was going on. I'd just be spaced out. One day my***

English teacher came up to me and asked me what was going on with me. She kept at me, called me when I didn't come to school for a week to see if I was all right. She started having me come after school and helped me with my work—even my math. The thing is, she noticed and she cared and she didn't give up on me. That was the turning point for me. She gave me a book to read that really got to me. It kept me hanging in at school. I don't know what would have happened to me if it weren't for her."

When teachers talk about what motivated them to become teachers, a significant number mention the influence of a particularly fine teacher they had in school. Almost a third of the students we surveyed spoke with great love and appreciation and even a sense of debt about some teacher who had nurtured their interests, cared about their progress, had reached out to them and believed in them. During the turbulent teenage years, such attention and caring can spell the difference between dropping out of school or staying in, between working hard to be able to get into college or deciding one has no chance and just isn't "college material," between discovering some new academic interest or being bored. Students extrapolate from their experiences with mediocre teachers in a subject to assuming that the subjects themselves are boring. For bored students, the motivation to go to school, is to get a diploma in order to get a job and to be with friends. Learning is not a part of the scenario.

Ineffective teachers mean more than just lost opportunities to learn some subject, or that students are annoyed for one period a day. Poor teachers can erode students' confidence, their fragile sense of acceptability to their peers, and can contribute to truancy, dropping out and acting out. Students go to great lengths to avoid teachers they feel put them in uncomfortable or humiliating positions—and if unable to avoid them, students can be affected for a long time by classroom situations they feel undermine, degrade or humiliate them. Too many students in our research speak with anger or embarrassment about such teaching interactions.

Thirty-five percent of the students surveyed have had at least one teacher they feel "treated students in ways that were harmful."

"There is this one teacher in our school who everyone knows about," says Sarah, a student in middle school, "He's really rude and just likes to embarrass kids. He calls us names that have to do with how we look, like "skinny" for a really fat boy, or "Big Mamma" for this one girl who is really developed. And if you get something wrong, he just announces it and embarrasses you. I told my mom and she was really nice about it and signed so I could transfer out of his class, but the thing is, he was the only one teaching that subject that year."

It may seem obvious that teachers can mean so much to their students. But in all the debates about the quality of teaching, in all the arguments about fiscal support for the schools, in all the attention paid to student scores as the indication of the success or failure of our schools—the issue of the quality of connection between student and teacher becomes lost, and teachers cease to be seen by the public and even by many administrators as the power they are in the lives of students.

Most are okay..

Students are vocal about the few "great" teachers they have had and the few "really bad" teachers, but their view of the majority of teachers is harder to elicit. "Fine" and "okay" are their most likely responses to queries about the general quality of teaching. Students' generally positive or accepting feelings about the quality of teaching are interesting because the assumptions underlying education reforms are that the quality of teaching is less than it should be, that the profession is failing to attract and hold the better teachers, and that the recruitment, rewards and training of teachers must improve. But this is how Rick, a high school senior, sees it:

> ***"The thing is, you may be lucky enough to get one or two great teachers while you're in school. And you may get stuck with a couple of really bad ones—you know, boring, or who don't know what they are talking about or who are mean and nasty. But mostly, at least here at our school, most are okay. I think most of the kids here would say that. The real problem is the few really bad ones, and everyone knows who they are. But overall, our teachers are really okay."***

Students were asked to rate the general quality of teaching in their school and the quality of teacher they currently have. As with many of our survey findings, the responses differed vastly from school to school, but gender, age and race did not make much difference.

In general, how would you describe the quality of teaching in your school?

	Overall	*Range of School-by-School Norms*
Very good	*23%*	*12%-34%*
Good	*52%*	*50%-57%*
Fair	*38%*	*16%-30%*
Not good at all	*2%*	*.5%-5%*

When asked about teachers in their own classes, the response was a little less positive.

In your opinion, how many of the teachers you currently have are "good" teachers?

	Overall	Range of School-by-School Norms
All	14%	4%-16%
Most	48%	22%-51%
Some	36%	23%-60%
None	2%	0%-2%

These results illustrate students' general tendency to feel charitable about their teachers. Their answers to general questions were more favorable than when asked about specific teaching and classroom situations. The majority of students apparently view most teachers as "good enough," a few as "wonderful," and a few as "terrible." **The problem as they would define it is not how to improve the overall quality of teaching, but what to do about those few teachers who they consider awful.**

It is difficult to ascertain whether students' generally positive judgment of teachers is due to low expectations, lack of expertise or experience, or represents a more realistic assessment about the teaching quality than is held by researchers, journalists and the public.

According to Shanti, a high school senior, most students have somewhat low expectations of their teachers.

> ***"We have some really horrible teachers. They come to class stoned or you can smell something on their breath. Or they just don't know what they are talking about and could care less about the class. They just don't seem to take us very seriously. But then a lot***

of the kids are like that, too. But there are also some teachers who make it all worth it. When a kid lets those teachers know they want to learn, those teachers will really pour everyting they've got to give into you. The excitement works both ways. I think the teachers are so happy to get students who care, and the students are so happy to get teachers who are good. But overall, we just don't expect much from our teachers—and I guess the teachers don't really expect much from us."

The teachers we interviewed judge teaching to be of even higher quality than the student respondents.

Excellent or very good	*40%*
Good	*35%*
Average	*10%*
Don't know	*15%*

But even those who felt the educational level has remained high complain that the quality is compromised by lack of materials, lack of support, and large class size. The larger the school, the more negative overall judgments by both students and teachers about the quality of teaching. As with most aspects of this research, school size affected perceptions of the quality of teaching. ***The larger the school, the more problems reported by students and teachers with the quality of teaching.***

With the exception of the problem of dealing with the few "bad" teachers,, students and teachers alike view reforms as important because of difficult working conditions that prevent teachers from doing a better job—not because of an overall lack of quality in teachers. A San Francisco high school teacher said:

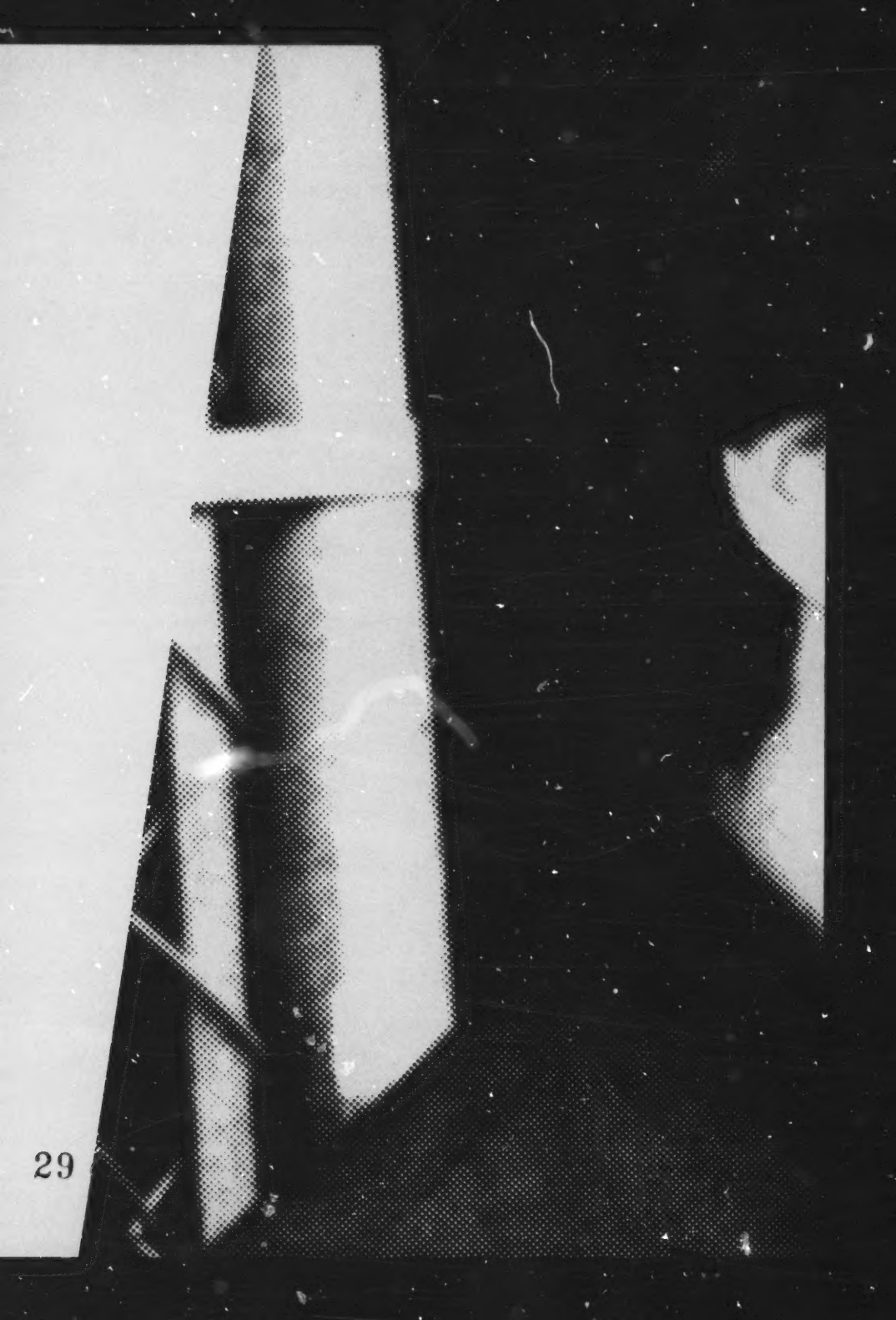
> ***"Please, we are on a stripped-to-the-bone situation and you ask about the quality of teaching! I think it's remarkably good considering the conditions. We are cut too thin, we have little support and almost no***

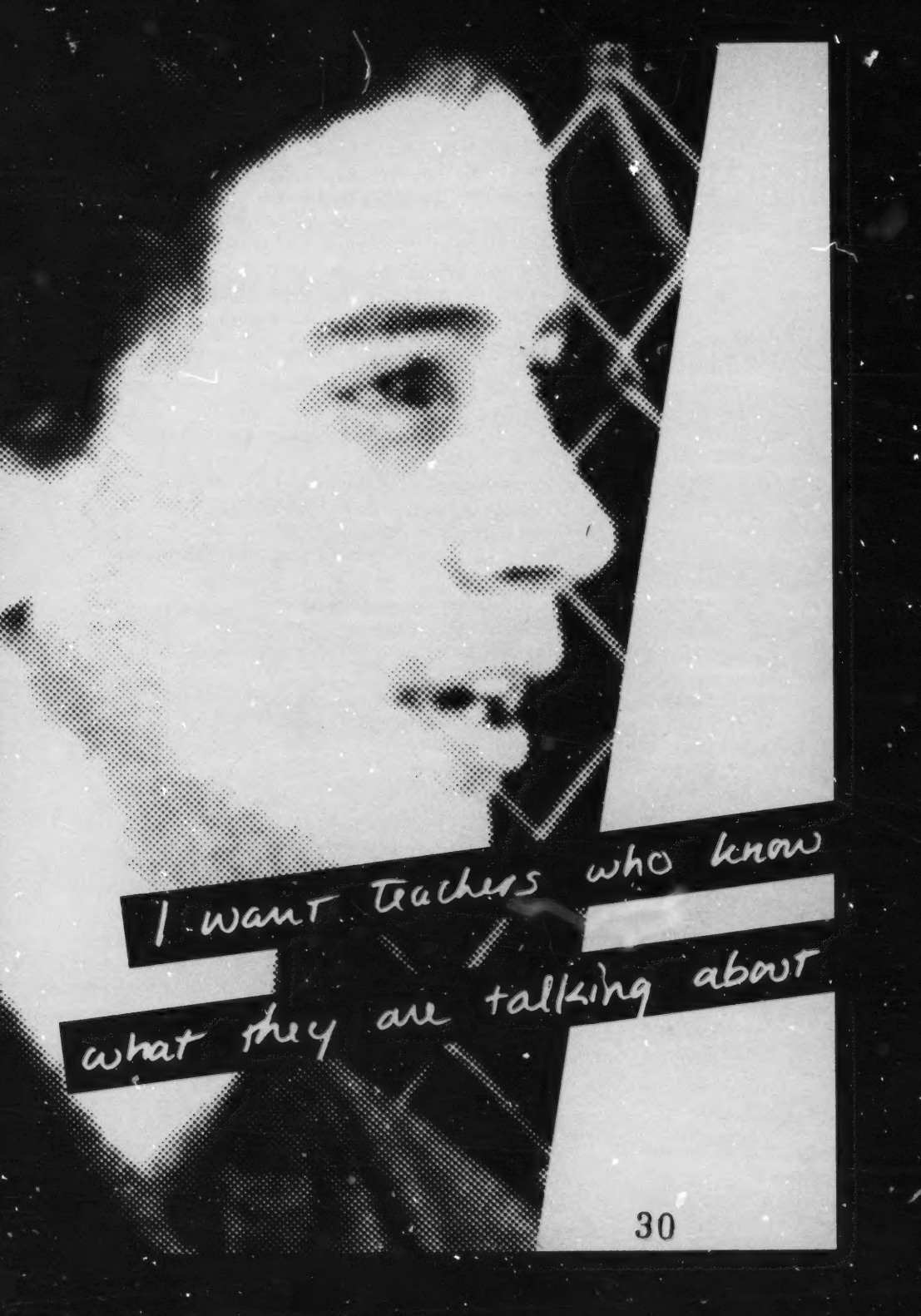
> ***materials. The quality is good considering. . . but it could be and should be much better."***

Teachers, like students, say that the problem is not one of overall quality, but of a few "poor" teachers and a few "truly excellent" teachers, with most teachers being generally competent and doing the best they can under difficult circumstances. One Oakland high school teacher said:

> ***"I can't really comment on the quality of teaching here. I teach in my classroom and the others teach in theirs and we never get a chance to see each other in action. From the general feel in the school I think the quality is okay. I know the teachers are mostly dedicated and hardworking."***

Perhaps the confusion lies not in differing judgments about the quality of teaching, but the different measures that are used. Students, teachers, professional educators and the public value somewhat different characteristics. While they may agree on a list of problems, their priorities differ. ***While teachers feel their working conditions are the major issue, students rank problems with teacher knowledge of subject and accessibilty as the primary concern.***




I want teachers who know
what they are talking about

Students are concerned about learning. They expect a teacher to teach them a subject. ***An overwhelming majority consider knowledge of a subject matter a teacher's most important characteristic.*** *Being knowledgeable, able to communicate what they know and make it interesting were part of almost every student's description of effective teachers. The emphasis on knowledge of subject matter increases as students get older and academic pressure intensifies and the gap between what students and teachers know lessens. Overall, however, students feel a teacher's primary job is to teach subject matter, to communicate it well so students understand it, and to convey a sense of enthusiasm or excitement about the subject.*

> ***"You can tell if a teacher doesn't know what they are talking about. They keep referring to the book all the time, make a lot of confusing statements and have to keep going back to correct themselves. They stick pretty much to the text book and can't help you with problems because they don't know the answers themselves."***

That's what Sandra, a sophmore in high school said, and it was typical of student responses. Three quarters of the students we surveyed have more than one teacher they feel do not know enough about their subjects to teach it well.

"Of all the teachers you currently have in your school, how many of them do you think know their subjects well enough to teach it?

All...22% ***Most...53%*** ***Some...23%*** ***None...2%***

"Knowing a subject," according to students, translates to having sufficient grasp of the subject to be able to explain it, answer questions about it that go beyond material presented in class, provide a context so students understand what the subject is "good for" and how it is used, and give some guidance to students in finding materials and resources.

Student comments evidence great concern about whether and how well they are learning. High School students in particular express concern not just about their own grades, but about the quality of instruction their entire generation is receiving. Well-publicized test scores comparing achievements of this generation's students to previous generations, an increasingly competitive labor market for youth, and fear that "we are not learning what we need to know" have created

great concern about the quality of instruction.

Comments from Jessica, a junior, are typical:

> ***"What can I say? I just feel kind of burned when I walk into a class and there is a teacher who doesn't know what they are talking about. I know there are lots of excuses—it may be the guy's first year of teaching, or maybe they had to substitute this person just this semester because of some scheduling or money problem. But to me it doesn't matter. This is my education, and I want to learn."***

Students make clear that a well-liked teacher is not necessarily a "good" teacher, and vice versa. And they confess that in choosing classes sometimes they opt for a teacher they like rather than one who has a reputation as a "good" teacher. But, generally, students want to be in a class where they will learn, where they feel their time won't be wasted and where they will be challenged. This in spite of the fact that many teachers' No. 1 complaint is about students who "don't want to learn."

With hiring freezes and scarce resources, principals frequently assign teachers to subject areas in which they are not trained. Principals and teachers maintain that a "good teacher" can learn to teach almost any general subject adequately. They exclude foreign languages, music, physical education, math and the sciences. But English, social studies, history, and social living courses are commonly assigned to teachers with no previous experience in that subject. Yet students are sufficiently upset about the unprepared teachers for it to be mentioned as a problem in 60% of the student surveys.

Pat, a high school senior, echoes the frustration expressed by many students in interviews:

> ***"At our school, the teacher who is in doing the journalism class and in charge of the newspaper and yearbook has no experience at all. Those of us who worked on it last year have been trying to help out, but it's crazy, because he doesn't know the first thing about it. It's really unfair to us—we're supposed to be here to learn, but they don't give us anyone we can learn from!"***

The characteristic of good teaching students rate highest is knowledge of subject. Their most common complaint is about teachers who don't know a subject or can't communicate it clearly. The reform students rank highest is to test a teacher in a subject before allowing him or her to teach it. That reform was ranked lowest by both principals and teachers. Although the 1983 Education Reform Act mandated such testing, emergency credentials are still granted without tests, in part because principals who must reassign teachers often consider it an emergency and use the emergency credential as a matter of convenience.

A teacher who is new to a subject needs extra time to prepare the curriculum and approach. The additional prep time is likely to make the teacher less available to students and less able to provide clear instruction.

In such situations, students need a teacher or tutor available to help them; and teachers need additional time to study the subject and figure out their instructional approaches and need some experienced teacher in that subject they can go to for help to brainstorm, get support and ideas.

WE RECOMMEND: TEACHERS BE ASSIGNED TO TEACH ONLY SUBJECTS THEY HAVE ADEQUATE TRAINING OR EXPERIENCE TO TEACH; NEW TEACHERS AND NEWLY REASSIGNED TEACHERS BE GIVEN EXTRA PREPARATION PERIODS AND A BACK-UP OR "BUDDY" TEACHER WITH WHOM TO WORK; EMERGENCY CREDENTIALS BE ISSUED ONLY WHEN ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

SOMETIMES YOU JUST NEED A LITTLE EXTRA HELP

"It's a sinking feeling when you don't understand something in a class, and everyone else seems to get it. It just helps a lot if a teacher is willing to help you through it and not make you feel dumb. Sometimes you just need a little extra help, and a good teacher does that. . .after class or after school or even sometimes during class, they are just willing and happy to come over and help you out."
Mike, 8th grade

High on students' lists of characteristics of good teaching were accessibility of teachers and their willingness to provide additional help when students need it. Particularly students in large schools say it is difficult to get help when they fall behind or don't understand some assignment. Large classes make one-to-one teaching during classtime difficult, and the heavier class loads and lack of "office" or preparation time reduce a teacher's availability. Finally, in large schools students often have a more difficult time feeling close to any teacher or adult to whom they might go for help.

The "better" teachers, according to students, go out of their way to follow-up with students who fall behind, reach out to students who seem to be having trouble, and give students opportunities to ask questions and get help during classtime.

Students stress they need their teachers for one-to-one help, to get questions answered and to discuss their work. But several factors contrive to make this difficult. Large classes and overcrowded schools increase every teacher's student load making it more difficult to respond to individual needs unless they remain at school after hours.

To maximize student access to teachers, WE RECOMMEND: TEACHERS HAVE REGULAR "OFFICE HOURS" WHEN THEY ARE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS FOR SCHEDULED OR DROP IN APPOINTMENTS FOR EXTRA HELP. IF THIS IS NOT FEASIBLE, AT LEAST ONE TEACHER IN EACH DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE AVAILABLE ON THIS BASIS; TEACHERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO USE SOME PORTION OF CLASSTIME EACH WEEK FOR SMALL GROUP OR ONE-TO-ONE WORK WITH STUDENTS.

A good teacher is . . .

A ***sense of humor, flexibility, enjoying students and fair discipline policies, were also high on students' lists of effective teaching characteristics.*** *Ability to control the class was rated higher in larger and urban, inner city high schools. Overall, however, there was remarkable consensus among students about what makes a good teacher, although the importance of specific characteristics varied from school to school.*

Students often mentioned two elements of ineffective teaching that relate not to the quality of instruction, but to how students are treated. Teachers who embarrass students, whether during attempts to control the classroom or just trying to inject some "humor" into the classroom, are disliked by most students—and some students said they would "do anything" to avoid those classes. Teachers humiliating students is particularly a problem in the middle schools and junior highs, and ranked third overall in the list of qualities of poor teaching.

The second related problem identified by students is favoritism. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to what people think about them and how well liked they are. Being noticed by a teacher, feeling liked by peers and adults are important to teens. Students, particularly younger teens, express anger and hurt about favoritism shown by teachers for certain students. They object to rules applied "unfairly," to rewards and recognition going primarily to a few favorite students. As one junior high school student, Katie, put it:

> ***"Once you get into junior high you feel kind of like a nobody. There are so many kids there. Then if you get a teacher like my math teacher, your heart just sinks. There's just no hope for getting anything. He has these three pets. They always get to do the problems on the board, and get to help him with the handouts and stuff. He just barely notices anyone else.***
>
> ***You can work really hard but guess who gets the "A"s. The rest of us are just invisible to him."***

Middle school students rank characteristics related to how students are treated much higher than did high school students. *Thus, not embarassing students, caring about students, not playing favorites were high on the lists of middle schools and lower on the lists of high schools in the study. The overall consensus defines effective teaching this way:*

A GOOD TEACHER...	*A POOR TEACHER...*
knows his or her subject well	*is confusing*
explains clearly	*plays favorites*
makes a subject interesting	*embarrasses students*
gives extra help to students	*can't control the class*
has a sense of humor	*doesn't know the subject*
is fair and consistent	*won't answer questions or help*
gives regular feedback	

Because some feel that younger teachers might relate better to youth than older teachers, or that students might feel differently about male and female teachers or teachers of specific races, students were asked about these factors. None appears to make a difference to the vast majority of students (96%). However, racial prejudice was identified as a problem in how some teachers deal with students by 39% of our sample. The majority of those responding affirmatively were racial minorities—and they tended to be clustered in certain schools. In one project school more than half of the students reported racial prejudice among faculty members as a problem.

> ***"Our science teacher taught here years ago when the school was mostly white. Now the school is mostly black and he just can't stand it. He makes remarks sometimes about black people, and talks about how the school used to be better and stuff. You just feel it that he doesn't like us," explains Pat, a senior in high school.***

Criteria for effective teaching and the characteristics of good teachers differ from school to school depending on student demographics, the priorities of the school program, and the problems of each site. However, in every school students "know" and agree on who the few "bad" teachers are and who the "really good" teachers are. They try to schedule their classes accordingly and groan in sympathy when a friend announces he or she must take "that" teacher's class, or express delight when assigned to a "good" class. But the criteria are seldom articulated or used as a basis for hiring or evaluating teachers.

Half of the students surveyed said it is important to have some way to let the school administration know who the poor teachers are, or some way to communicate to the teachers what they consider wrong with their teaching—some "safe" way. They want to be "up front" about the problems with specific teachers and have their concerns acted upon in some way. Steve, a junior in high school, explained:

> *"They don't hesitate to fail one of us if we don't cut it. But it's all of a sudden a hush-hush thing if a teacher isn't cutting it. It's not really fair to us, though. Why should we have to sit in someone's class and be embarrassed and put down and not learn anything just because it's not polite or allowed to admit out loud that someone is a bad teacher. There is no place to go. Everyone would just suspect a student of "sour grapes" if we complained."*

Almost half of the students felt that having a "good" teacher work with a "bad" teacher as a team or consultant might help. But they also urge that student evaluations be considered in analyzing a teacher's problems. Issues such as embarrassing students (a major issue in several schools in this study), favoritism, or presenting material in a confusing way may be less apparent to an observer than to the students. Says a high school teacher in Los Angeles:

> *"I think, really, most of us know who the problems are on the teaching staff. But the key to a good faculty is really finding dedicated people. People who are in teaching because they love it—they love the subject; they love working with kids. And the majority of people here are really like that. But all of us could use some fine tuning. We get into our classrooms and no one ever peeks in to see what's going on. You can get off on your own trip and never have a reference point for what's effective, what could be better. Your students are the guides. . . if they do well, we feel good about our teaching. But it would be good if there were more specific feedback—from our students, from parents, from other teachers, from the administrator. . . from somewhere."*

Paradoxically, hardly any teachers ranked student involvement in evaluating or hiring teachers as a good idea. Students feel they wouldn't have credibility or be trusted, and this was borne out in the comments of administrators and teachers. An Oakland teacher put it:

> ***"Students would just use it as a way to get back at teachers they don't like. They like the teachers who give them good grades or grade easy."***

While there is fear and distrust of direct student evaluations of teachers, the desirability of feedback from students is acknowledged. The problem is finding a "safe" process. There is support and positive response to the concept of analyzing student criteria of what constitutes good teaching and then taking that criteria into consideration in the regular evaluation and hiring process.

> ***WE RECOMMEND THAT EACH SCHOOL SITE SURVEY STUDENT ATTITUDES AND VIEWS ON CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD TEACHING AND PROBLEMS IN TEACHING AT THEIR SCHOOL SITE, AND THAT THIS BE UTILIZED IN THE HIRING AND EVALUATION OF TEACHERS.***

It's not the method,
it's how it's used

A teacher's classroom techniques are not directly correlated with student judgments of effective teaching. Teachers who students rate good may use the same techniques as those they consider ineffective. However, certain methods are used by good teachers that are absent in the classrooms of poor teachers.

Student analyses of teaching techniques reveal that interactive methods are the hallmark of good teaching and are almost non-existent in the classrooms of poor teachers. Group discussions, small group work, one-to-one help are rated as frequently used methods in classrooms of good teachers and ranked of high importance to students. Overall, teaching styles that students characterize as "poor" utilize far fewer interactive classroom methods, and provide fewer (or no) opportunities for students to work collaboratively. David, a tenth grader, says:

> ***"The classes you really hate are the ones that are real mechanical. Where you just plod through the book and answer questions at the end of the chapter. The best teachers really encourage you to think about the material. It's not just, you know, here are the facts and the information—go memorize it. I like it when a teacher helps you get into the material, helps you see that it can be exciting and why it's important, and encourages kids to really think about it."***

Regular tests and one-to-one instruction or extra help were rated as tops for providing the feedback students seem to want. Kristen, a ninth grader in Oakland, voiced a concern many other students mentioned as well:

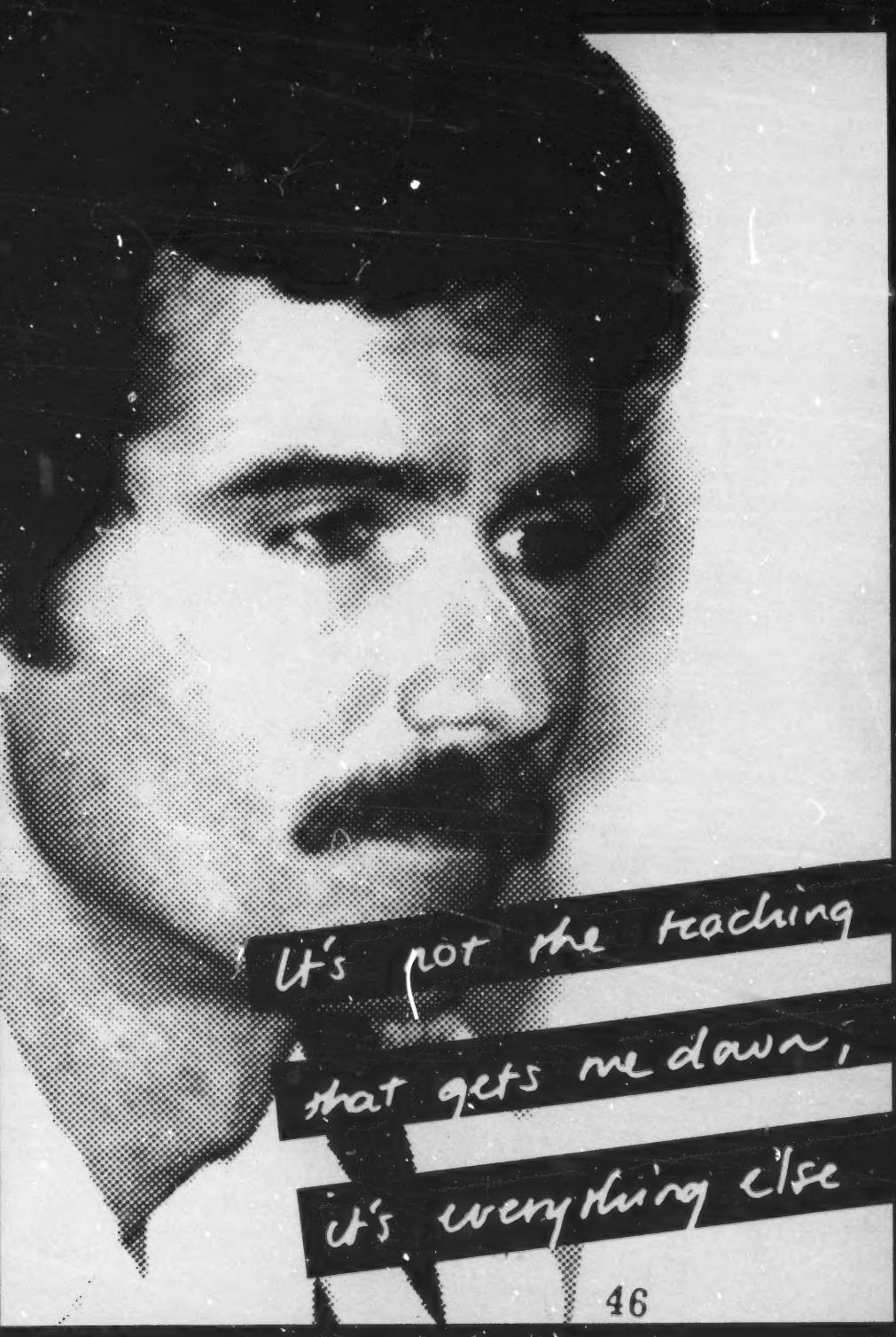
> ***"It's important for me to know how I'm doing in a class. I don't think it's fair to have to wait til the end of the semester and then find out I'm not doing so well. Some times I think my teachers don't really notice how I'm doing either til it's too late."***

Homework, say students, is assigned as often by good teachers as by poor teachers —but how the teacher handles the homework and the usefulness of the assignment varies greatly.

"Homework by itself doesn't mean anything. It can be work that uses what you're learning and can even be interesting and fun and can help a lot, or it can be copying from the book and "make work." At our school everyone gives homework—some of it helps you learn and some of it doesn't," explains Sandy, an eighth grader.

Methods Used	*Students Rank Order— Good Teachers*	*Students Rank Order— Bad Teachers*
Regular homework	*1*	*2*
Group discussions	*2*	*9*
Regular Tests	*3*	*6*
Extra help or 1:1 instruction	*4*	*8*
Small group work	*5*	*11*
Films	*6*	*5*
Chapter by Chapter through textbook	*7*	*1*
Lectures	*8*	*3*
Hands on experiences	*9*	*7*
Written reports	*10*	*4*
Field trips	*11*	*10*

Teachers do not tend to view quality teaching in terms of methods, but rather in terms of dedication and caring. The one area of teaching methodology that teachers feel is important in effective teaching, is the time and ability to do more one-to-one work with students.


It's not the teaching
that gets me down,
it's everything else

A great teacher can tremendously affect a student—building self-confidence and a love of learning that carry beyond that classroom. A bad teacher can be devastating. But learning is not simply the result of good and bad teaching. Teaching quality is inextricably tied to the teacher's work conditions. The better teachers manage to teach well despite difficult conditions. ***Most teachers say they work in conditions that are less than conducive to effective teaching and learning.***

Most effective teachers say they continually try to refine, hone, and experiment with new approaches to meet the challenge of different groups and kinds of students, try to keep up with breakthroughs in their field and new demands on the school. But to do this, teachers need an environment remarkably like what makes a good learning environment. They say they need intellectual stimulation; encouragement to attempt new approaches to problems without fear of being penalized or judged a failure; opportunities to work collaboratively and to interact with others in trying to solve problems; an environment that recognizes and prizes competence and ensures the continuing development of skills; and responsibility for shaping the program.

How can a teacher help students learn when that teacher is afraid of failing or attempting new and difficult things, or does not continue to develop skills and won't risk being judged?

Yet, many teachers complained of feeling distrusted or not noticed, working in classrooms too crowded to cater to the needs of individual students, environments where collective bargaining and other tensions have divided faculty from administration, where the classroom is frequently disrupted, where they feel powerlessness, overloaded with non-teaching duties and no extrinsic rewards.

This report, based on what students say is important to them in a teacher and on what teachers have told us about the conditions and circumstances that affect teaching quality reveals a vision of a teaching environment unlike that in most public schools. Working to make that vision a reality requires changes in school and classroom policies, in the profession of teaching and the training of new teachers, and a more positive public attitude towards education. Turning this vision to reality would involve:

- *A faculty/administration relationship that is characterized by support, collaboration, and rewards and support for innovation. This means administrators must encourage and stand up for teachers who try new approaches, and teachers must be willing to share their problems, take risks and be open to evaluation.*
- *Giving teachers time to collaborate with other teachers, to obtain consult-*

ant help, create new approaches, seek new materials, and to prepare for classes. Options might include daily prep time, days off for professional development and sabbaticals.

- *Aspects of teaching that cannot be done in the classroom with large groups of students would occur by making teachers available on a one-to-one basis (office hours) to help students develop independent assignments and help tailor group learning to individual needs.*
- *Clear explication of expectations for everyone involved (students, teachers, parents, administrators), regular communication and evaluation and feedback. The school would become a working model of the continuing search for knowledge and a better way to do things. Teacher job descriptions would specify non-teaching responsibilities (hall duty, after school activities, ditto operator, etc.).*
- *Collaboration (team teaching, consulting with others, problem solving sessions) would be included in the regular functioning of the faculty—adding to the intellectual excitement for the teachers and modeling to students that learning is the result of working together, trying new things, constantly honing, improving and searching, and using the skills of honest, supportive evaluation to help improve.*
- *Performance and behavior standards would be clear for students, teaching and administrative staff—and the entire school population would be in agreement about their overall purpose. Anyone unable to enter into the pursuit of excellence and learning would be worked with until they can, or removed when they keep others from the task.*
- *Smaller school size allows for better communication and more intimacy among teachers, between teachers and administration, among students and teachers and parents and the school. Schools would strive to create more human dimensions in their groupings—either by reducing overall school size or by creating some small groups during the school day. Schools would be characterized by open communication.*
- *Economic changes have caused the public to pinch pennies in most areas —especially taxation—and in the process, to re-evaluate its priorities. The schools have suffered greatly from the lack of resources and the close scrutiny of programs. In our vision, the public would be well-informed about the purposes and successes of the educational system, and committed to supporting it with enough resources to do a quality job.*

Two high school teachers, the first from Los Angeles and the other from Oakland, tell what it's like to teach in this sort of rare atmosphere:

"The issue is really adult leadership, and I don't mean just the principal. It's creating a system where all the adults feel committed to creating a school that's excellent. *Where we all feel a part of the school, and share responsibility for leading the school in a positive direction."*

"I have never had happier teaching days than when I was part of a group who were pilot testing and refining some new curiculum materials. We (the teachers) were given really innovative things to try, spent time together discussing how it worked and what worked and why. . . it was really intellectually exciting to be working with new approaches and to have that kind of contact with other teachers."

School sites differ dramatically in atmosphere and conditions for teaching and learning. Some schools manage, in spite of tight budgets and the seemingly inevitable political tensions with "downtown" administrations, to be places where teachers feel free to teach, feel supported in their best efforts, and where the school community seems united in commitment to academic excellence. We have much to learn from these examples, where administrators work closely with their faculty giving them the major responsibility for teaching our students. It is their effort, more than any others, that can make the difference in educating our youth.

Contrary to a public stereotype that public school teaching is glorified baby-sitting with great hours and long vacations, students and teachers generally view the job as a difficult one. In response to a question about what things make effective teaching difficult, answers grouped as follows:

Students	*Problem*	*Teachers*
88%	*Students who don't care, or distruptive students*	*45%*
65%	*Lack of adequate materials*	*60%*
44%	*Lack of support or recognition*	*93%*
5%	*Classroom interruptions and schedules*	*57%*
25%	*Class loads & overcrowding*	*35%*
4%	*Too much paperwork and non-teaching duties*	*35%*

Teachers' responses added complaints about low pay, tension with administration, and lack of opportunity for involvement in decision making about the educational program and overall school direction.

DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS / STUDENTS WHO DON'T CARE

Students and teachers identified disruptive students as an obstacle to teaching and learning. In fact, it tops the following list of obstacles.

"What factors, in addition to the skill of a teacher, make it difficult for you to learn?

Disruptive Students	***63%***
Things going on in my life that make it hard to concentrate	***47%***
Scheduled into a class that is too difficult	***40%***
Time of day	***37%***
Outdated or unavailable books	***25%***

When asked what kind of behavior they find disruptive, students mention a variety of behaviors which follow a similar pattern. Patrick, a sophmore in high school, described such behavior:

> ***"A student just gets up and walks out, or starts talking to friends, or rolls a joint, or makes a smart ass comment—they are just bored, or want some attention or are acting out. Then, depending on how a teacher handles it, one person starts and it snowballs. It's some excitement, a break in the norm of just sitting and other kids get into it. It's usually just a few kids."***

Students generally refer to a "few bad kids" that "spoil it for everyone." The problem, however, is partially a factor of age. There are more complaints about disruptive students and kids who "don't care" in middle school through the ninth grade than in high school.

Students explain the problem partially in terms of excess energy, boredom, and as response to how a teacher teaches.

> *"Everyone will say that it's the kids that cause the problem," explains Carolyn, a senior, "But it varies so much from class to class that you can't really say that. It's the teachers that make the difference. There are some classrooms where no ono acts out. There are some that are crazy every day. If it's a serious class, where you learn and the teacher takes you seriously and takes the whole class seriously, kids don't act out. When energy starts to pop out, they figure out a way to use it."*

In a 1980 Nationwide Opinion Poll done by the National Education Association, more than half of the teachers said student behavior interferes with their teaching. Six of ten reported that students' negative attitudes towards learning can lower their morale and job satisfaction. Teachers yearn for a classroom of students who want to learn, and an end to the discipline problems that plague many classrooms and urban schools. The teachers generally saw the discipline problems as related to lack of clear discipline policies within a school, and teachers who can't motivate youth. As one San Francisco teacher put it:

> *"If a teacher is firm about the rules and sets clear limits; is firm but not grouchy, and really lets everyone know we are there to learn something—kids shape up and everyone is so relieved."*

Students hear their teachers complain about "how hard students make it for them." Students diagnose disruptive students as acting out; their teachers as unhappy in their jobs. So, in evaluating what makes teaching difficult, they point their fingers first at their peers.

But students tend to blame their peers more than teachers do. When asked what would make teaching an ideal job, about causes of teacher burnout, or about what might make it easier for a teacher to do a good job, teachers mention the attitude and interest of students in tandem with, or of secondary importance to, other issues. A teacher in a Los Angeles high school wrote:

> *"There are several important things that make for a good teaching environment for me— more respect and support from the administration, better pay, and work-*

> ***ing with enthusiastic, motivated students. Students who come to class, who want to learn."***

Teachers tend to link discipline problems with other issues—administrative support in handling discipline problems, policies or programs for ejecting disruptive kids from the classroom, their own ability to motivate and interest students in a subject, classroom interruptions, outside noise that makes concentration difficult, and the "tone" regarding acceptable behavior in the shcool.

Yet, support from each of the sectors of the school system look and feel quite different. Teachers usually don't look to their students for "support," but they do expect cooperation. Students, however, believe their teachers want them to be sympathetic and to "do something" to make the situation better. A Contra Costa teacher explained:

> ***"It's hard to know really how supportive students are of the work we do. We can tell when a student is respectful of grown ups, we can tell if they do the work and do what they are supposed to do. But it's harder to tell if they are appreciative. A kid who suddenly shows a lot of progress, or who gets turned on to the subject. . . those are the moments that make teaching really worth it all. But I can't tell how the kid feels about us as teachers, or if he thinks of it at all."***

In fact, many faculty in the school that participated in our Students for Quality Teaching Project commented on how important it had been for them to hear what the students think and feel about the teachers in the school.

LACK OF MATERIALS

In our penny pinched schools, lack of materials (particularly in the social studies and science classes) can be a real problem. Students and teachers alike cite it as affecting the quality of teaching. Over half of the teachers cite lack of materials as a barrier to effective teaching, and students complain that it affects their ability to learn as well. Apparently, problems arise in several areas. First, students work from out-dated books which require that a teacher put in extra time preparing supplementary dittos or finding other means of providing materials/ information to make a subject current.

> *"Our textbooks are really out of date," explains a 10th grade teacher. "We use a 1954 book in our social studies class. But the world has changed so much! Geography, economics, political alliances. . it makes my job really tough. I finally went out and bought a current world map out of my own money just so kids could see boundaries the way they are now drawn."*

Second, when students have to share books, the amount and kinds of work that students can do independently is greatly restricted. Hands-on work, especially in science labs, is greatly curtailed. A San Francisco high school science teacher describes the problem:

> *"I spend a couple hundred dollars a year for supplies for my classroom, because I just don't see the point of trying to teach chemistry if my students can't actually do the experiments."*

Third, lack of materials and of funds to purchase new supplies hampers teachers from trying new approaches sometimes. One teacher spoke of having heard of a good simulation game that might have helped in a social studies unit that her class each year had a difficult time grasping. Her department did not have the $150 needed to purchase it.

Finally, teachers often spend a great deal of time and their own money creating materials that should be readily available to them. Time after school goes into hunting down cheap sources of supplies, typing dittos and copying materials. In schools where teacher morale is already low, this additional burden is greatly resented and taken as yet another sign of the lack of support and respect that exists for their task.

The complaint by both teachers and students about a lack of adequate materials for the classroom (particularly in the social studies and sciences) was widespread. Inadequate and outdated materials result in extra work for teachers who spend their own time and money trying to develop supplemental material. Students share books and are unable to take their books home to study. The overall result is that both teaching and learning are compromised.

In some schools, appeals are made to parents for the extra funds needed for materials. Where parents are willing and able to donate money, schools report little problem in this area.

WE RECOMMEND THAT SCHOOLS PLACE A HIGH PRIORITY ON FINDING THE RESOURCES FOR ADEQUATE CLASSROOM MATERIALS.

LACK OF SUPPORT OR RECOGNITION

Teachers do not teach in a vacuum. They work with students to help them learn. Their work environment is governed by a school administration and shared among a faculty of other teachers. Teachers' morale and enthusiasm are greatly affected by their relationships with these groups.

Again and again in this research, students and teachers used the words "lack of respect" and "lack of support" to describe the absence of a sense of community intent and joint effort in educating students. Teachers feel unappreciated, left-out of program decisions, blamed solely for problems and failures. And they yearn for students who want to be in class and who appreciate their teachers' efforts, for an administration that facilitiates their work in the classroom, for parents who are interested enough in their children's education to help at home with student attitudes and school work, and for a faculty that works together and helps each other.

Students agree that lack of support for teachers is a problem, but they tend to see themselves as the major culprits, as the following table shows.

		Student Views	*Teacher Views*
Are the students in your school generally supportive of the teachers?	*Yes*	*10%-30%*	*65%-95%*
Are the teachers in your school generally supportive of each other?	*Yes*	*33%-45%*	*80%-90%*
Is the administration in your school generally supportive of the teachers?	*Yes*	*35%-42%*	*20%-90%*
Are the parents in your school generally supportive of the teachers	*Yes*	*30%-50%*	*50%-80%*
Do you feel the public is generally supportive of teachers?	*Yes*	*20%-40%*	*5%-15%*

The ranges of response represent differences in schools. Some schools were noticeably on the "low support" side for all groups, while others clustered on the "high support" side for all groups.

A school tended to be characterized either by a sense of support for the teachers or lack of support. But each population defined support differently. Support from students is different from the kind of support desired or expected from administrators.

Although teachers do not seem to look to their students for "support," they definitely do look to their colleagues and to the administration—with definite expectations of support. Questions about administrative support, in fact, elicited the most comments and response of any other area of questioning in our research with teachers. While the administration's relationship to the teachers is somewhat ambiguous in the minds of students, it is the central element which teachers identify in analyzing the quality of teaching in a school. ***Every single interview with teachers in this research identified the necessity of administrative support and respect in making quality teaching possible.***

In some schools, hostility or tensions due to union problems with management were cited as chief barriers to good working relations between teachers and the administration. Caught between union and administration demands, and frequently facing increased tension between faculty members, teachers in schools that are in the midst of negotiations frequently cite tremendous stress and dissatisfaction. In other schools, teachers would cite what they label "incompetent" administrators, or administrators with "more of an eye to downtown than to what is needed by the school." These are the negative sides of the coin. However, teachers were also clearly able to articulate the kinds of administrative support that helped them to do their best teaching.

The elements of administrative support seem to include:

- *responding promptly with clear action when teachers complain about school problems such as noise in the halls during classes;*
- *having an "open door" policy with faculty, and being available to teachers to discuss issues, and consulting the faculty on decisions which affect the overall learning program and school environment;*
- *displaying enthusiasm for the school program;*
- *instituting and enforcing clear school discipline policies;*
- *making an effort to see that whenever possible the teachers have the materials and clerical support they need;*
- *encourages teachers to be creative and give the freedom to do own curriculum development; and*
- *provides feedback and encouragement to the faculty.*

Working condition problems which pertain to overloads in work, difficulties with class or school size, low pay, being expected to do extra-curricular duties, etc. take on very different flavors depending on the above kinds of support that teachers feel from their administration. While at one school where faculty feel quite good about their administration, teachers may need to (or be expected to) do a great deal of extra work beyond the classroom and teaching—they do so willingly and in the spirit of improving the entire school program. In another school, characterized by tensions and problems between administration and faculty, the least little addition to a work load is resented and fought.

Where teachers feel part of the decision making, appreciated and supported by their administration, the kinds of problems that regularly confront our public schools and which make high quality teaching difficult become somehow handleable. The field of education has long known that an effective administrator is the key to good quality education. This research merely supports that premise with regards to the quality of teaching. ***The single element most affecting a teacher's enthusiasm for their job is the existence of a supportive administration.***

THE ROLE OF OTHER TEACHERS

Students do not view teachers as particularly supportive of each other, or even particularly having a relationship with each other. Students generally experience their teachers one by one, not as a group—except when there is labor-management problems and students see a group of union teachers and "others." While between a third and a half of the students think their teachers are supportive of each other, the most common response to the question was a blank of "don't know." Teachers, however, see each other as their major support—but without the kind of impact that administrative support appears to have. The kinds of support most mentioned included:

- *sharing of materials, approaches and information*
- *willingness to substitute for each other on after school activities, etc.*

Some schools seem characterized by isolation of teachers and some hostility or dislike between faculty. At times this was related to political differences between opposing unions particularly after strikes or walkouts; at other times to an administration that showed favoritism towards certain faculty members.

Almost unanimously, though, teachers express a desire for more interaction with each other—team teaching, problem solving sessions, opportunities to observe each other and to swap approaches.

Teachers express a strong need for some recognition of work well done. As an Oakland teacher explained:

"I notice that teachers burn out when they begin to feel they are inadequate to do their job well. It's discouragement which is often really just because no one is saying thanks, or no one acknowledges or recognizes the effort. Everyone needs a pat on the back sometimes even if you know you're doing well. But this means someone has to know what's going on in the classroom so the successes are noticed. The blanket "Teacher Appreciation" stuff is nice but doesn't really seem personal. A single comment of a parent, a student, a principal in response to an actual thing you've done—it goes a long, long way."

While people are wary of involving students in critical assessments of the teaching at a school, teachers rank student feedback and responses as the best reward for their work. Students seemed surprised in the course of this project to find that their teachers generally like working with them. Teachers were surprised at our project schools to find out how much caring and gratitude students seem to feel for them. Clearly, communication between students and teachers as a group is lacking something important. With few mechanisms for students to express appreciation or expectations to their teachers—it simply does not get conveyed.

WE RECOMMEND:

DEVELOPING MECHANISMS AT THE SCHOOL SITE FOR STUDENTS TO EXPRESS GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION TO THOSE TEACHERS WHO HAVE BEEN MOST EFFECTIVE.

EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW MODELS FOR RECOGNIZING AND REWARDING GOOD TEACHING THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER LADDERS AND OTHER REWARDS.

REGULAR EVALUATIONS OF ALL TEACHING STAFF WITH AN EYE TO RECOGNIZING HIGH QUALITY WORK, ENCOURAGING TEACHERS, AND IMPROVING AREAS OF WEAKNESS.

DEVELOPING LOCAL DISTRICT AND STATE LEVEL SYSTEMS TO RECOGNIZE SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS.

OVERCROWDING

Large class size, overcrowded school facilities, and very big school populations are mentioned by students and teachers alike as problems affecting the quality of teaching. Generally, larger schools seem more characterized by low teacher morale and more tensions between teaching staff and administration. Students in those schools view their teachers as more dissatisfied and less accessible to students. With accessibility and availability of teachers as a major characteristic which students consider in "good" teaching, it is not surprising that in the larger schools students tend to rank their teachers lower in overall qualty. This is even true in highly academic schools.

As teachers' class loads increase, they often turn to less interactive methods (again a primary characteristic of effective teaching, according to students). One teacher, in a San Francisco high school, complained:

> ***"I've got homework from 200 kids each night. I just can't assign them writing or independent work. I have to give them work that has the kind of answers that are easily gradeable. Think of having to go over the work of that many kids, and tell me what you'd do!"***

Teaching styles that may be effective with smaller groups become problematic with a group of 40 for 50 minutes a day. An English teacher spoke of the effect of class size on her methods:

> ***"If I put the class into small work groups, I can't even get around to them all within a class period. More and more I'm having to figure out new ways to work with the class. In my training, we did a lot of stuff with class meetings, one-to-one work, and small group approaches. It's almost impossible with classes the size I have now. We don't even have chairs and tables for everyone."***

Thus, class size and teaching load partially determine what is taught, the assignments given, teaching techniques, and the amount of time a teacher can devote to the individual needs of students.

INTERRUPTIONS, PAPERWORK AND NON TEACHING DUTIES

A great deal of activity occurs in schools that is not directly associated with classroom learning. Student activities, which are very important to students and which many believe are an important part of a well rounded school program, cut into classroom time as students are excused from classes, assemblies are scheduled into the day, and special announcements are made. The interruptions in a classroom period can be an annoyance to a classroom teacher and cause havoc in trying to instill concentration within a classroom period. Many teachers complain about the frequency with which students go in and out of classes for special activities and the number of interruptions and special projects in which they are required to take part which detract from actual classroom time.

The school day is ruled by bells. A bell rings, and everything stops; students pack up their books and walk out of the classroom. A bell rings, and regardless of whatever conversations or activity has been going on, class is expected to begin. A major skill teachers develop is in focusing a class, getting them involved and trying to complete a lesson within time allotted by the bells. The school day is filled with transitions and interruptions even when all goes smoothly. Yet, in many schools, class periods have further interruptions as bulletins are read, special announcements made, surveys (like ours) are administered and students are pulled from class for a variety of other activities.

In order to make special activities possible with such limited staff resources, and to cover the many duties related to running a large public school, most teachers are required or pressured to take on non-teaching duties. Hall duty, chaperoning dances, sponsoring clubs, driving students to special events, etc. are accepted with differing degrees of enthusiasm by faculty depending on relationships between faculty and administration and on the heaviness of the class loads each carry. However, in some schools, non-teaching duties are a source of great resentment—while in others they appear to be cheerfully accepted as part of the job.

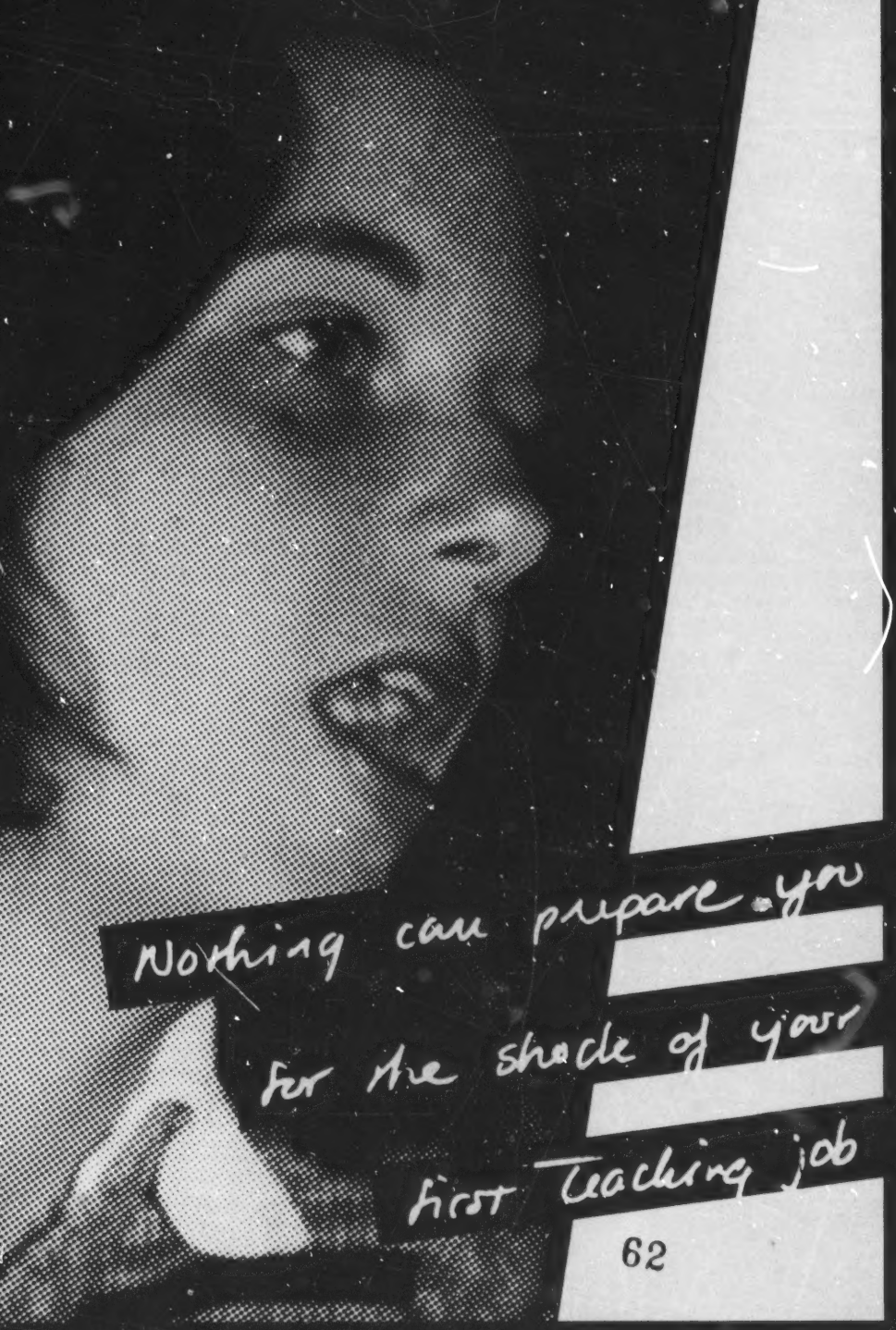
Teachers report that a combination of their overcrowded classes, no breaks in a day, yard duty and other non-teaching responsibilities, and the amount of paperwork they are expected to do combine to create a constant pressure in the work day. And yet again, school by school differences are marked. There are some schools where an effort is made to reduce the paperwork burden on teachers, and where teachers cheerfully take part in non-teaching duties that they feel are in-

tegrally related and important to the overall school program. There are others where tensions between faculty and the administration, and lack of communication about those same non-teaching duties result in a great deal of resentment and anger on the parts of the teaching staff. The difference, according to teachers, lies in teacher involvement in making decisions about the overall school program, in the openness to and structures for communication between administration and faculty, and the problem solving approaches of the school as a whole.

WE RECOMMEND THAT ACCURATE JOB DESCRIPTIONS BE DEVELOPED FOR TEACHERS AT EACH SCHOOL SITE, INCLUDING EXPECTATIONS FOR BOTH TEACHING AND NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DUTIES.

WE RECOMMEND THE INVOLVEMENT OF TEACHING STAFF IN PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF AND HANDLING OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND NON-ACADEMIC ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOLS' FUNCTIONS.

WE RECOMMEND A CONCERNTED PUBLIC EFFORT TO PLACE A PRIORITY ON FUNDING FOR THE SCHOOLS THAT CAN ENSURE REALISTIC AND EFFECTIVE CLASS SIZE AS WELL AS ADEQUATE MATERIALS.


Nothing can prepare you
for the shock of your
first teaching job

Students clearly distinguish between teachers they feel know their subject well and those who don't but they did not correlate this with "new teachers" versus "experienced teachers." In fact, when queried about "new" teachers, students had little to say. Teachers, however, were vocal about the ways teacher training falls short in preparing them for those first few years in the classroom.

Said one teacher, just in her second year of teaching:

> ***"In my training program they used to joke and tell us to be sure we didn't smile before Christmas. There was a lot of teasing about losing control of the class, and how the kids would terrorize us. But in fact, we got no preparation for how to really create a focused and disciplined class. I was terrified when I started. I wanted so badly for the kids to like me, and to do a good job. I had my lesson plans so neatly laid out for the first months, but had to throw it all out the window. I was just totally unprepared for having kids with so little skills and so little interest. Suddenly, there I was in front of a group of 25 students all staring at me and waiting for me to do something. Nothing, nothing at all prepared me for the shock of that first semester. I was a wreck."***

Teachers' criticism about teacher training programs centered on several issues:

- *The need to better prepare teachers for the working environment of modern public high schools.*
- *The need to learn time management.*
- *Better preparation (philosophically and methodologically) for dealing with discipline problems in the classroom.*
- *The need to make the training period more "realistic."*
- *Better preparation in the subject one plans to teach.*

Though student teaching is required in California, the teachers we surveyed felt field training for prospective teachers should be more reality-based. This would mean more responsibility for curriculum, more opportunities to develop their own style and to handle discipline problems, more opportunities to observe successful teachers in the classroom, and student teaching placements in a variety of schools.

One experienced teacher in a Contra Costa school suggested:

> ***"Prospective teachers need to get out of the universities and into the classroom more often to interact with students, to experience the noise level in the halls, etc. And then they should get a period where they are teaching full-time in their own classroom, but being highly supervised—with someone to fall back on or go to when it's just overwhelming and you can't figure out what to do. There is nothing harder or lonelier than that first year of teaching."***

Teachers also recommended that new teachers be assigned a "buddy" faculty member within their department, extra preparation periods and be given an orientation to the school.

THERE IS ALWAYS AN UNSOLVED CHALLENGE

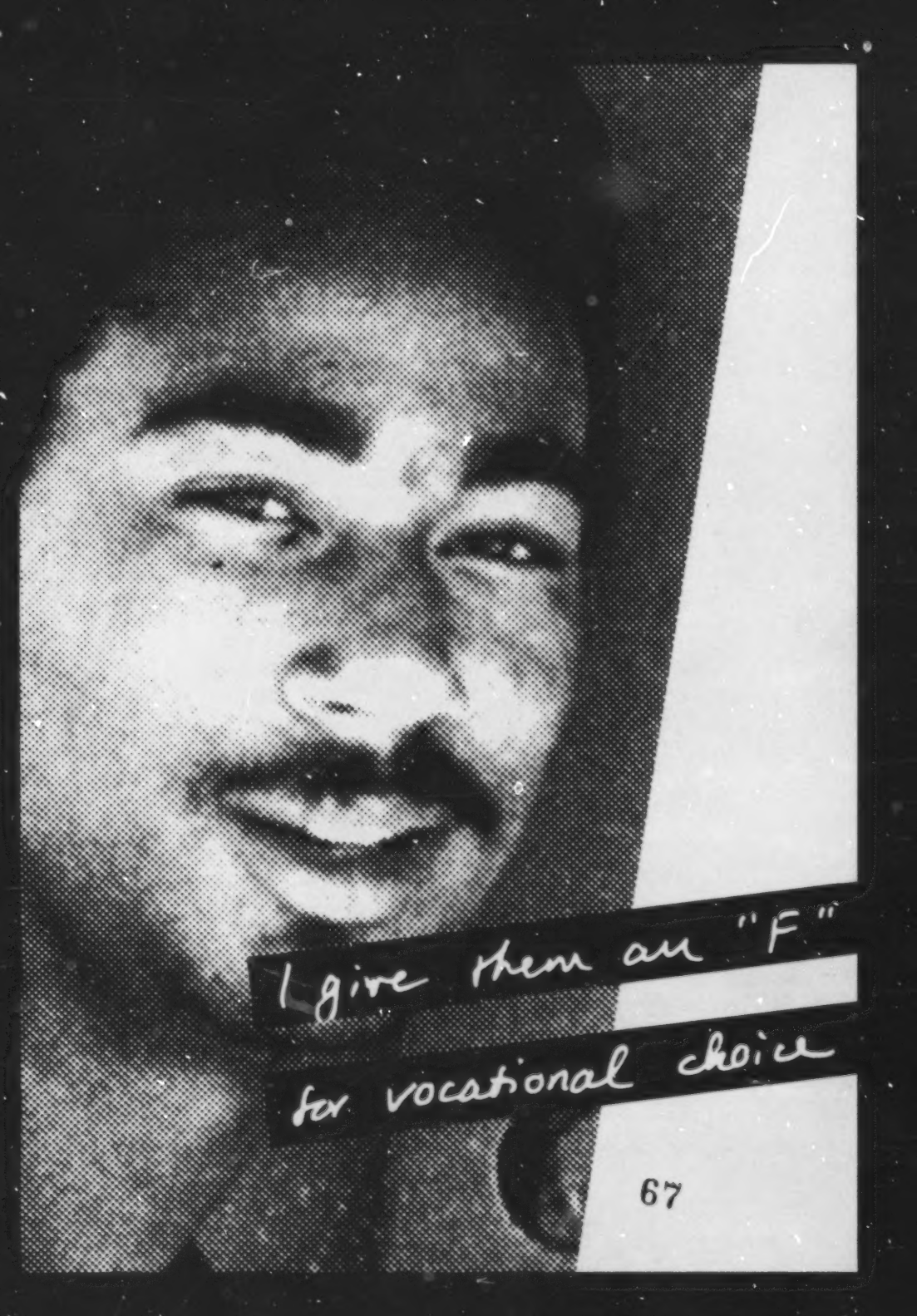
Teachers were asked what kind of in-service education they would like, and what skills they want to develop in their own teaching. The strongest theme that emerged from their responses was the desire to observe each other teaching, swap approaches and methods and focus on specific classroom problems. For example, at an English department in one school, teachers wanted to be able to discuss among themselves how they could handle teaching to the wide variety of language skill levels reflective of the new immigrant population.

> ***"I want to hear from other teachers who have managed to do something successfully in the same kind of situation I face every day. Not just hear from them, actually, but go to their classes and observe. The real challenge of teaching is that every year some new situation arises—a kid who has a new kind of problem, a classroom that has some really unique dynamic, etc. The fact that I was trained ten years ago isn't the point —what I'm facing now is new."***

Teachers spoke often of their isolation in their own classroom, the desire to see how others present subject matter and handle classroom dynamics. They also expressed a desire for general discussion and brainstorming about student problems.

There are new methods teachers would like to develop, although the range of their requests is wide. However, every teacher in our research mentioned some direction in which they want to grow—if they had time and resources. Some are directions teachers feel they could pursue on their own (such as a course they want to take, a special opportunity to spend time in a business related to their work) if they were given some time off from teaching. Others are areas that teachers need help finding the resources to develop. Teachers also asked for in service updates in their subject area, or opportunities to consult with experts in their field.

WE RECOMMEND: SCHOOLS INSTITUTE REGULAR MEANS OF TEACHER INTERACTION FOR SHARING METHODS AND SOLVING PROBLEMS: TEACHERS BE GIVEN RELEASE TIME TO OBSERVE OTHER CLASSROOMS IN THE SCHOOL AND IN THE DISTRICT: AND, SABBATICALS BE AVAILABLE TO CLASSROOM TEACHERS SO THEY CAN DEVELOP NEW SKILL AREAS AND AVOID STAGNATION OR BURN-OUT.


I give them an "F"
for vocational choice

> ***"The thing that does it for me is to find out years later, in a note or a visit, that some student I had back then was really moved or influenced by something I did in my classroom, and that they remember and mark my class as a kind of turning point."***
> *—An Oakland junior high school teacher*

> ***"It's truly a job that knows no end. . . the challenges are ever present."***
> *—A Los Angeles high school teacher*

In the decade ahead, California will be facing a teacher shortage. Many educators have criticized the "mediocrity" of those who have been entering the teaching profession, but our concern is less about the quality of those who are attracted to teaching than the pool of people who could become fine teachers but who at this time wouldn't consider entering the field. The profession's low status, comparatively low wages, and the very negative public view of the working conditions at public schools all contribute to scaring off potential teachers.

Generally, students viewed teaching as an underpaid, difficult profession that few would want to enter. Less than one fifth say they would even consider entering the field. When asked why, students told of hearing their teachers complain about low pay, long hours, disruptive students and lack of respect. An eighth grade student, Lee, explains:

> ***"Our teachers always tell us how hard their job is. I feel bad for them. Up at 3 in the morning to grade papers. They don't get paid very well, and no one ever thanks them. I don't know why they stay in the job! I'd certainly never do it."***

The vast majority of students perceived their teachers as dissatisfied with their jobs. Overall, 20% said they believe all their teachers enjoy their job—but such optimism diminished among older students. School by school differences, however, ranged from 10%-45%—reflecting differences both in levels of teacher satisfaction depending on school site, and the degree to which teachers communicate their dissatisfactions to their student. Only 7% said they believe all of their teachers like students. So, students view teaching as unpleasant—and themselves as a burden on their teachers.

> ***"I feel sorry for my teachers." says Kevin, a ninth grader, "Really I do. I think that students these days must be a drag to work with. I don't know why my teachers stay in it—it doesn't seem like a very good job."***

This view is particularly poignant when contrasted with how teachers themselves ***actually*** *feel about their jobs. Complaints about overwork and low pay are certainly part of the picture for most teachers—but so, too, is a sense of enjoyment and dedication about teaching. Over half of the teachers interviewed in this research said they would even today choose to enter the field of teaching. They feel proud and unwilling to give up their work in spite of what they view as increasingly difficult working conditions. Years of developing competence in a subject area, and students who continue to learn and grow are rewards of the job that are seldom communicated to students but which teachers feel deeply.*

In spite of some ambivalence, nine of 10 teacher said they intend to stay in teaching because they enjoy working with students, the challenge, they feel teaching is important to our society and they like having summers off. For some, retirement plans play a role in their decision to remain in teaching. A San Francisco high school teacher said:

> ***"I went into teaching to help kids. I hated school when I was young because of some really bad teachers who just didn't care about us. I love kids, and I want to be a friend and teacher to them. To help them figure out the world, love themselves and enjoy learning."***

While most students cannot imagine why anyone would become a teacher, and state raising teacher salaries as the best way to entice people to enter the profession, teachers cited other factors that drew them to the field. The majority cited a desire to work with youth to do something "valuable," to make an impact on a generation. This finding is supported by a 1981 National Education Association survey, which found that 70% of teachers said their No. 1 reason for entering the profession was a desire to work with young people. Many also were drawn to the field through love of a particular subject matter which they wanted to share with others.

> ***"I like teaching because I love learning," said a Contra Costa teacher when interviewed for this research, "And***

> *I love language and want to share that love with others. I have fun interacting with students and seeing them begin to use language differently."*

Almost two-thirds also mentioned the influence of a teacher in their own lives. Finally, a number of serendipitous factors brought some to teaching, such as limited opportunities for minorities and women in other professional fields, and the Vietnam War. One San Francisco teacher talked to us about how he became a teacher:

> *"I had been an accountant and was tired of working in isolation. So I started doing some tutoring of drop-out kids and one said to me, 'If you had been my math teacher, I would have stayed in school.' That gave me the push to go get my credential and to go into teaching. When I was younger, it would never have occurred to me."*

Another teacher ended up in the field for other reasons:

> *"At the time I started out, it was one of the better jobs for women. It was in the early 60's and there were few respectable high paying jobs for women. I fell into teaching because I really didn't have much choice—what other options were there?"*

Ten percent of those interviewed indicated they did not want to stay in teaching, the reasons expressed were not reflections of a burned out population or because teaching itself was unsatisfying or too difficult. Rather, the desire for upward mobility, the opportunity to learn something new, or the low status of the teaching field were the prime motivators.

In the midst of difficult working conditions, pay that is considered low by most standards, and a general lack of public support, it is clear that some rewards must be present intrinsically in teaching in order to keep people in the field. An Oakland teacher wouldn't consider leaving teaching:

> *"It's a wonderful job. Nothing that private industry has to offer could possibly beat for me the excitement of seeing my students get turned on to the subject."*

The status of the profession and the visibility given to teachers' complaints at the expense of voicing the satisfactions and successes contribute greatly to the situation in which teachers feel de-valued, students feel guilty and people hesitate to enter the field.

Communication between teachers and students on the issue of teaching is primarily centered around teachers' complaints. Although 65% of the teachers interviewed said they enjoy their job, students reported only 20% of their teachers appear to enjoy their work. Most students take teacher complaints about working conditions seriously which contributes to low student morale and lack of enthusiasm for becoming teachers. One student researcher on this project said after interviewing the teachers at her school:

> ***"I always thought my teachers hated to teach. I had no idea that they really like us and like working with us. It made me feel really good to know how many of the teachers here said they like their jobs because they enjoy working with kids! We thought they were miserable."***

Teaching has been under fire for the past decade as student test scores reached new lows, the drop-out rate appeared to be increasing, and the problems of managing the public schools were exacerbated. The classroom teacher was often considered at fault.

This is a sharp contrast to the 1960's when teaching was viewed as a status profession and when the nation's "best and brightest" were called upon to enter national service by becoming teachers. Especially for teachers who entered the field a decade or more ago, the change in public image is cause for some bitterness. One San Francisco teacher complained.

> ***"There is no respect any more for the teaching profession. Sometimes it makes me want to just give up and makes me resentful. After a difficult day, you just realize how unappreciated our efforts are. The public thinks teachers are just putting in our time and that we are incompetent or glorified babysitters. It affects all of us. It's good the job has some built-in rewards—like students who do well—because we sure don't get any pats on the back or recognition from anywhere else."***

Both teachers and students feel the low public image of teaching is largely unwarranted, and rate the quality of teaching higher than they feel the public does. Yet little is done to communicate the satisfactions or successes of the job. Even students, who rate the overall quality of teaching as good, give their teachers an "F" for Vocational Choice."

Schools, and the profession of teaching, have an important public relations job—not to mask the problems, but to balance them with a view of the positive impact teachers can and often do have on their students' lives, a sense of the rewards teachers feel from their jobs, and the clear message that the educational system is of value to our society.

The consensus of students, teachers and administrators in our study was that attracting good people to teaching will require:

- *Raising teachers' salaries to be more competitive with other professions that require a similar length of training and are of equally vital import to society;*
- *Waging a public media campaign to raise the level of public support, understanding and respect for the work done in the schools, in part by publicizing the many rewards of the job;*
- *Create working conditions that facilitate quality teaching.*

A Los Angeles teacher made the following suggestion:

> ***"There are many people who even with the prospects of more money couldn't be enticed to go into teaching. Raising the salary level by itself will do very little about the problem. I think we should be stressing what teaching is all about, and striving to get people into the field who are attracted by that and who match it well. The rewards are really there—there is nothing so high for me as working with a kid over a period of time and suddenly they start to achieve. We need people who can be motivated and moved by helping students to learn. That's what we should be doing, going on TV and saying over and over, that teachers affect kids lives, that teachers are important. . . then we'll start getting people interested—the right people."***

WE RECOMMEND: A STATEWIDE PUBLIC MEDIA CAMPAIGN TO UPGRADE THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF OUR SCHOOLS, AND SPECIFICALLY TO ILLUSTRATE THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF TEACHERS TO OUR SOCIETY, ALONG WITH A VIEW OF THE MANY REWARDS OF TEACHING.

Conclusion

The students interviewed in this research reported problems with the quality of education in public schools. They also spoke eloquently and emotionally of the power of the excellent teaching that does occur, and with appreciation of the majority of teachers whose teaching they view as fine. We have tried to shed some perspective on the interactions between teachers and students, and on the expectations brought to that relationship. The student-teacher relationship is the most critical interaction in the education of a young person, and any attempts to improve educational quality must support that interaction.

California is in the midst of an economic and social transition, experiencing growing pains and often difficult and disconcerting change. By 1990, projections indicate that 50% of school-age children, ages 5 to 18 will be non-white, what is currently referred to as 'minority.' Moving away from an industrialized society to an information society is having profound effects on the labor market. There are fewer and fewer blue-collar, or 'unskilled' jobs and as technology advances, even 'unskilled' jobs demand a basic skill level higher than ever before.

Amid these transitions, problems in our educational system have arisen that may have a profound effect on the future of today's students. However, it is too easy and overly simplistic to put all of the blame over falling test scores, drop-outs, etc. on the nation's schools. Changes in the family structure, economic recessions, and the fragile status of our planet's survival also play a role in the current 'crisis' in education, although causal relationships may be difficult and even impossible to prove.

While there is no concensus on the cause of the problems, we need to work together to formulate solutions that are flexible enough to meet the changing environment within the schools and our society.

This report is not a blueprint of how to improve education. It does suggest that any attempt to find answers will be more effective, and produce more comprehensive solutions if students are involved in their design.

We also urge policymakers and the public to realize that the crisis in public education is not simply a result of what is or isn't done by those we empower to teach in the system.The public's ambivalence about support of schools and the role they wish education to play is to some degree responsible.

It is our hope that the voices of students can awaken us all to the need for some public soul searching and dialogue about our schools, and can stir us all to respond with wholehearted support. It is, of course, their education they plead for; but it is all of our futures.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Citizens Policy Center was founded in 1975 to assist young people in developing, using and believing in their decision making skills and their power to act. Committed also to strengthening youth policy in California, our projects demonstrate models that provide youth with the skills and support to speak and act on their behalf on public issues of concern to them, and to provide the research and forums necessary to create public policies which are truly responsive to the needs of young people.

The Center is a non-profit organization located in Oakland, California. Our research and advocacy projects extend throughout the state of California. Citizens Policy Center's research and publication series are disseminated nationally to policy-makers, program operators and other professionals who work with teen-agers.

The Students for Quality Teaching Project is the sixth in our series of research efforts to provide the public with information about how youth experience our public policies and institutions, and to provide a voice for teen-agers' concerns in the realm of public policy. Previous projects in the series have focussed on youth unemployment, youth experiences with federal employment programs, guidance and counseling in the schools, the drop-out problem, teen-age nutrition and stress.

The Students for Quality Teaching Project operated during the 1983–84 school year in four school districts across the state of California: Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco and John Swett Unified (in Contra Costa County). Schools sites were selected to provide a range in school size, type and focus. These included:

Lowell High School
San Francisco
Grades 10–12
School population: 2,950
Academic high school

Downtown High School
San Francisco
Grades 9–12
School population: 260
Continuation School

George Washington High School
Los Angeles
Grades 10–12
School population: 2,283

Carquinez Middle School
Crockett
Grades 5–8
School population: 550

Claremont Junior High School
Oakland
Grades 7–9
School population: 378

John Swett High School
Crockett
Grades 9–12
School population: 465

Oakland Technical High School
Oakland
Grades 9–12
School population: 1,051

Teams of student researchers (selected by Citizens Policy Center staff and school site principals) surveyed students and interviewed teaching staff. These students were trained and supervised by the research staff of Citizens Policy Center.

In each participating school site, student surveys were administered to 30% of the student body, or 150 students (whichever was more). The total study sample included 2,670 student surveys, and 137 teacher interviews. The student sample included:

By Grade:	*5th graders—1.3%*	*By Sex:*	*57% Female*	*43% Male*
	6th graders—1.5			
	7th graders—7.8			
	8th graders—6.3	*By Race:*	*Caucasian*	*28.9%*
	9th graders—17.9		*Black*	*29*
	10th graders—17.9		*Asian*	*22.5*
	11th graders—20.3		*Hispanic*	*11.5*
	12th graders—27.0		*Other*	*8.1*

Data was aggregated by race, sex, grade, and school site. Although the most significant differences were by school site, confidentiality was assured to all schools, and findings are only included in this report in aggregate form. All reported findings are statistically significant. Copies of the data collection instruments are available upon request from Citizens Policy Center.

For information regarding replicating the research process at an individual school site, consult the publication ***STUDENT VIEWS ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING: A MANUAL FOR STUDENT INVOLVEMENT*** *available from Citizens Policy Center.*

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